

LSE

Media and
Communications

Platforming families (PlatFAMs)

Authors

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UK report: Year 2 - January 2025



Economic
and Social
Research Council



Aims and approach

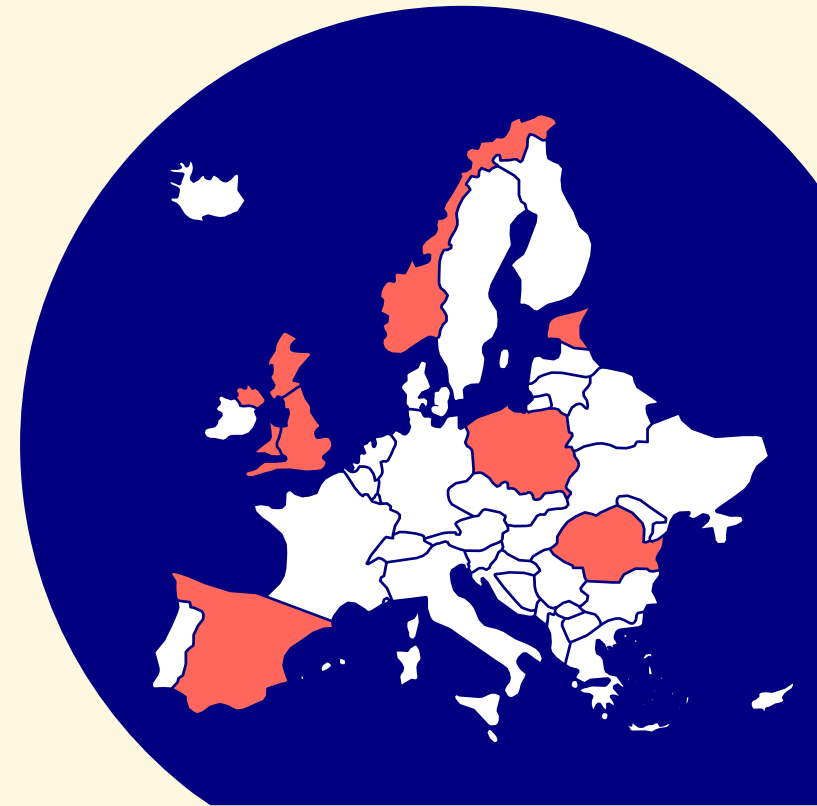


Research questions

'Platforming Families: Tracing digital transformations in everyday life across generations (PlatFAMs)' researches **three generation families** (children, parents, grandparents) in **six European countries**: Estonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, UK.

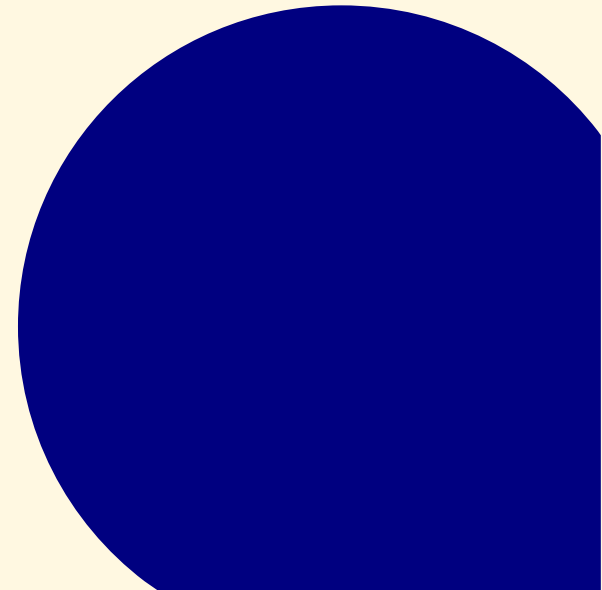
The project asks:

- 1** How are digital platforms embedded in the lives and practices of modern families?
- 2** What are the lived experiences and practices of navigating, negotiating and anticipating life in a platformised society?



Key themes

- 1 Platform navigation:** How and why people of different generations interact with different platforms, individually and jointly, and ‘domesticate’ them to make them meaningful within their everyday lives.
- 2 Negotiation with and through platforms:** How and why relationships within and beyond the family are co-constructed and reshaped by engaging with or relying on platforms.
- 3 Digital future-making:** How and why multigenerational families anticipate digital futures, both personal and societal, creating imaginaries that shape present practices and, potentially, future outcomes.



Defining key concepts

Family

“The idea of family is a fluid one that is gradually changing. The concepts at its core—direct biological relatedness, parental caring role, long-term cohabitation, permanent belonging—are being negotiated” (Hill & Tisdall, 1997). “An intersectional approach [addresses] the interrelations among class, gender, ethnicity, disability and other factors in shaping how families navigate and negotiate their digital lives” (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Platformisation

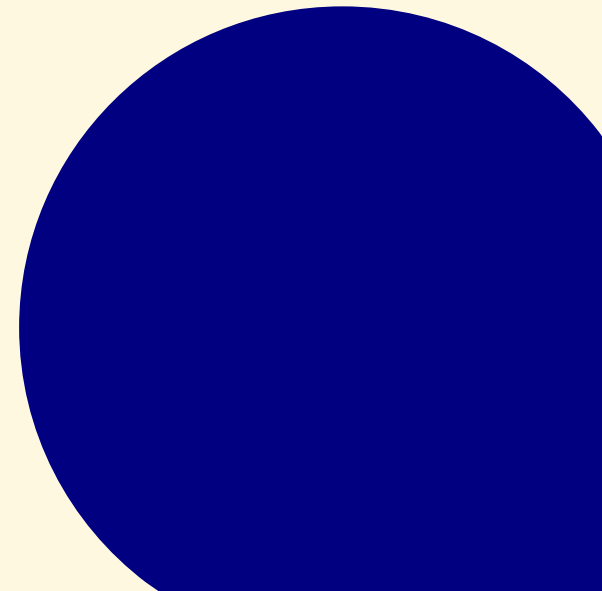
“The concept of platformisation describes the process through which platforms transform the fields in which they operate” (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). “Platforms increasingly provide the infrastructure for communication, work, learning, care, intimacy, entertainment, commerce and participation, and are widely taken for granted and relied on in everyday life” (Plantin et al, 2018).

Hill, M., & Tisdall, K. (1997). *Children and Society*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315841496>

Livingstone, S., & Blum-Ross, A. (2020). *Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives*. OUP. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190874698.001.0001>

Nieborg, D.B., & Poell, T. (2018). The platformization of cultural production: theorizing the contingent cultural commodity. *New Media & Society*,. doi: 10.1177/1461444818769694

Plantin, J.C., Lagoze, C., Edwards, P.N., & Sandvig, C. (2018). Infrastructure studies meet platform studies in the age of Google and Facebook. *New Media & Society*,. doi: 10.1177/14614448186661553



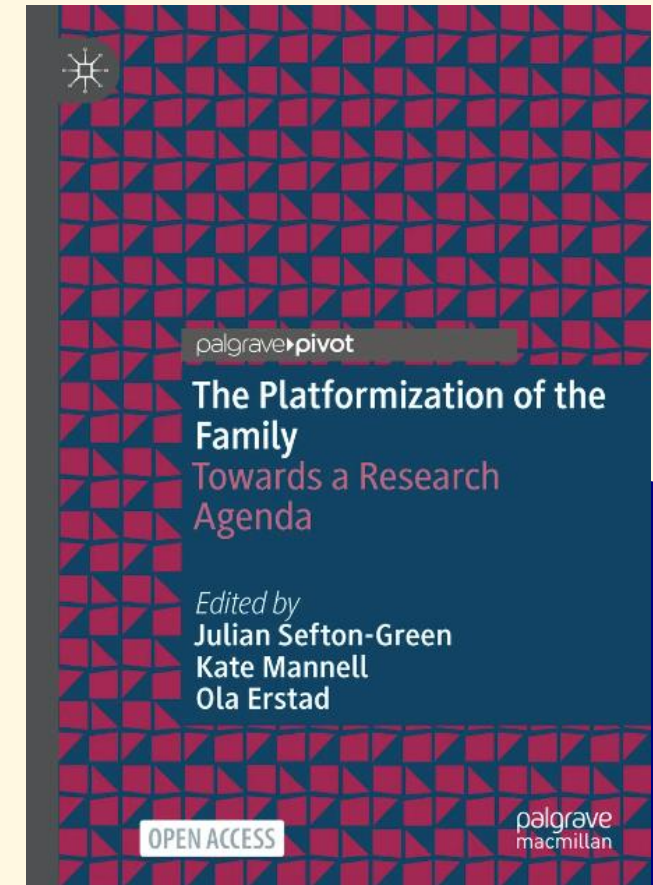
Platforms & family life – new book

There is lots of research on how children use platforms, but less about parents, and little about grandparents or about the relations among the generations.

Children are often defined as the family experts in using platforms – yet their digital activities can be invisible to parents and grandparents.

Research does show ways in which family intimacy, belonging, care, conflict and power struggles are now negotiated through using digital platforms.

The platformisation of family life creates new opportunities for children and parents but can create inequalities and marginalise older people.



Research methods



Qualitative family research – UK

Interviews focused on platform navigation and negotiation, relationality, future-making, and media childhoods, also including practical tasks (platform usage mapping and family app design).

Phase 1

In the UK, we interviewed a child (aged 8 to 17 years), one of their parents, and a grandparent in each of 21 families. These semi-structured interviews lasted about one hour per person. Most interviews were held at home, in person, though a few grandparents living abroad were interviewed online.

Phase 2

In the UK, two family interviews were held, each with the three generations together, about a year after Phase 1. These semi-structured interviews lasted nearly 2 hours per family.



Qualitative family research – Europe

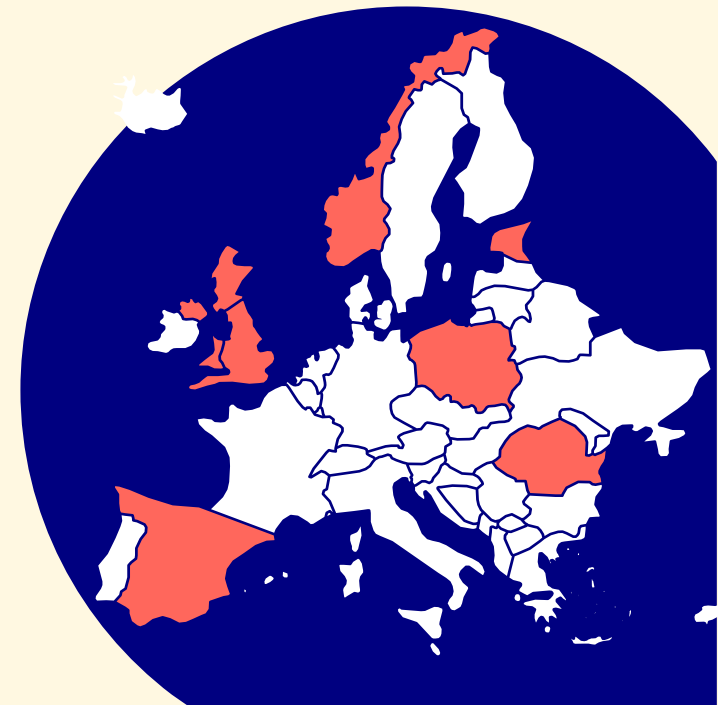
Project members from all participating countries collaboratively designed the research methods and tools. The tools were piloted in one family in each country and subsequently adapted based on the feedback.

Phase 1

Across the 6 countries, 104 three-generation families were interviewed, each with a child (aged 8 to 17 years), one of their parents, and a grandparent.
Interview guide Phase 1: <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/126677/>

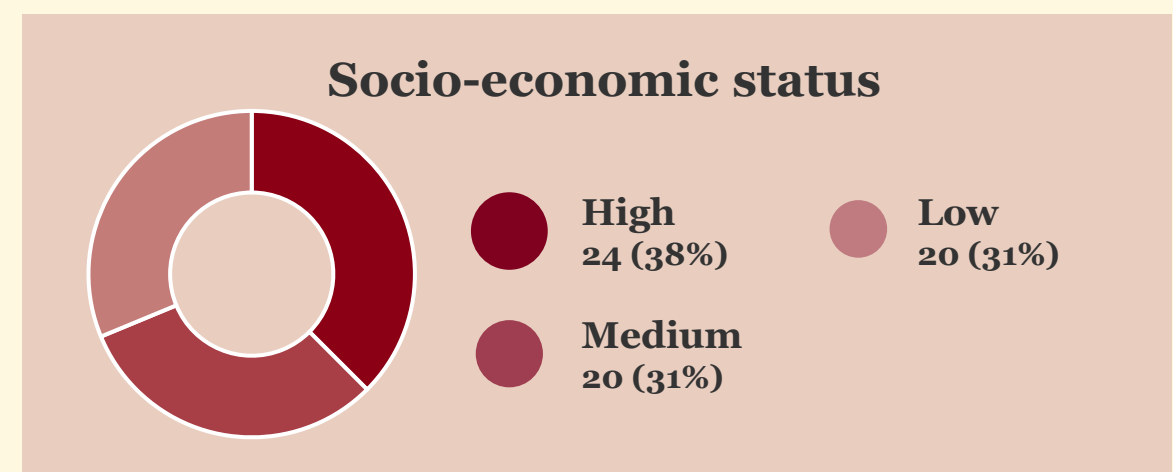
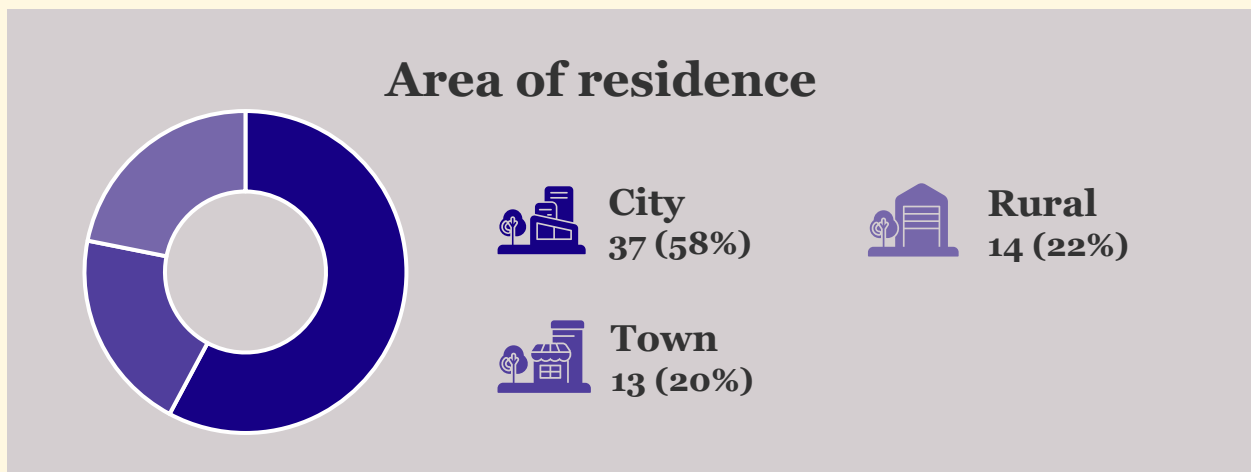
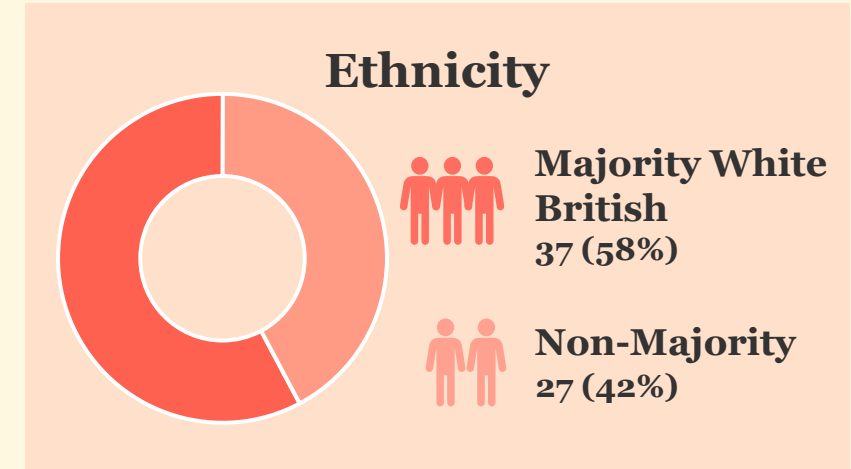
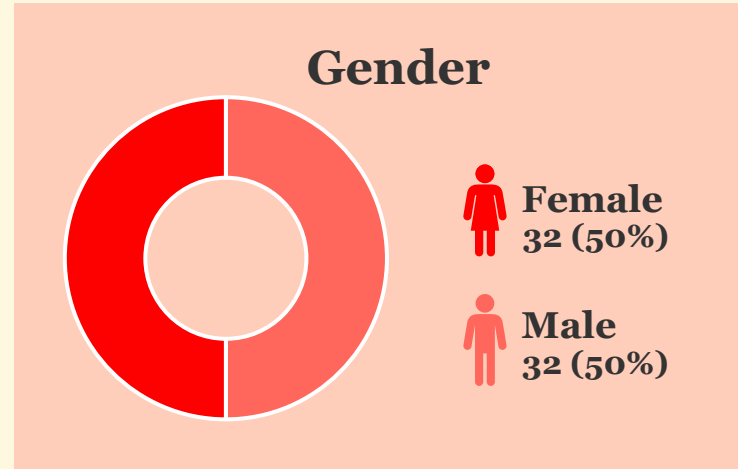
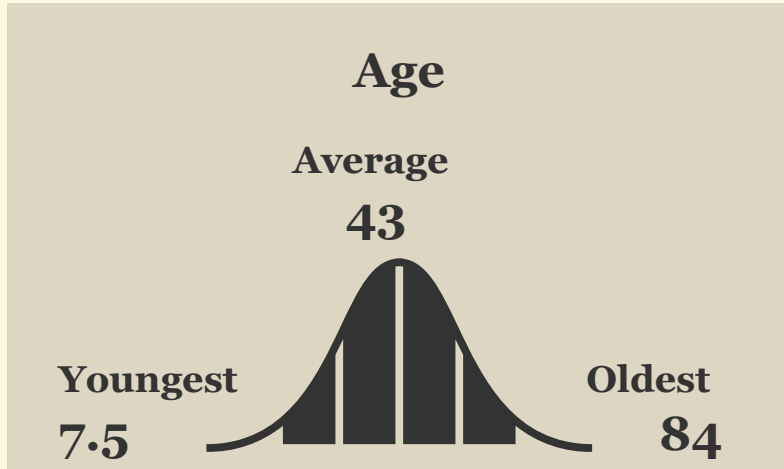
Phase 2

Across the 5 countries, 12 family group interviews were held about a year after Phase 1, lasting up to 2 hours per family.
Interview guide Phase 2: <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/126678/>



The UK sample

64 participants from
21 families



Mapping platform use

We asked each participant to map the platforms they use, using logos as prompts, adding more if needed. The interviews focused selectively on areas of interest to participants - among education; care, health and fitness; travel; streaming and entertainment; social networking; content creation; communication; cloud storage; shopping; parental control and family tracking; gaming; and payment and finance.

Offline

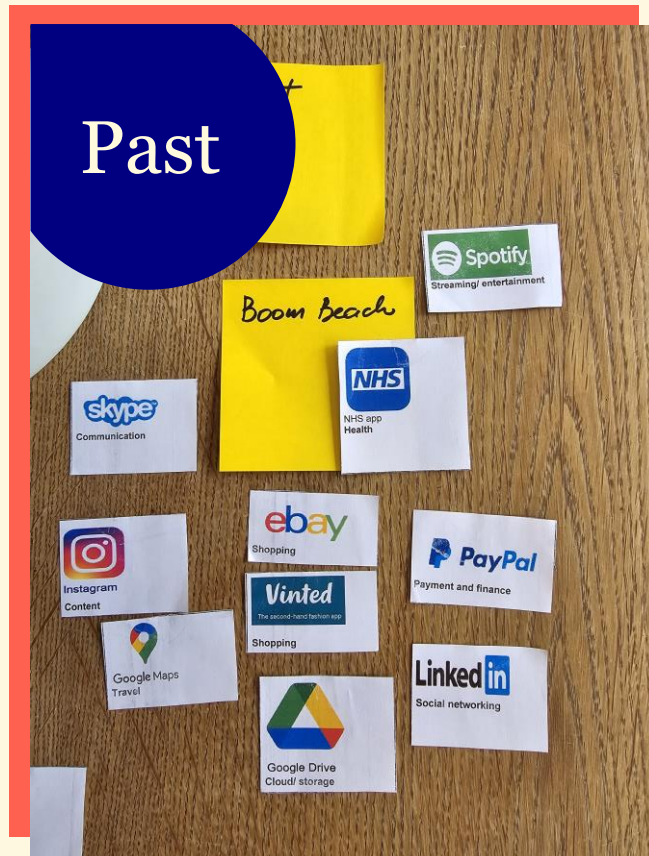


Online



Platform timelines

We asked each participant to rearrange the platforms they use to distinguish the platforms they use now, those they had used in the past, and those they thought they would use in the future.



Platform timeline for Dad, 56, UK

Reflecting on continuities & change

Their timeline enabled participants reflect on continuities and changes in their platform use. We invited their reflections on which aspects of their everyday life were more or less platformised and what that meant to them. For online interviews, the exercise was conducted with Microsoft Whiteboard.



UK recruitment and procedures

Recruitment

The participants were recruited through convenience sampling using a wide range of methods including distributing leaflets in public spaces (e.g., libraries), posting information on social media forums, contacting NGOs working with families, and snowballing from personal contacts.

Having to recruit three generations of each family was challenging and time-consuming. We tried hard to maximise diversity (age, ethnicity, location, family type) and balance gender and socioeconomic status.

Procedures

Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 39 mins and 116 mins (average of 70 mins, total 4,451 mins). We photographed the practical tasks.

We used thematic analysis combining inductive and deductive approaches to reflect families' perceptions and themes from the research literature.

The research was approved by the LSE Research Ethics Committee.



Exploratory analysis

Mind mapping

To initiate the exploratory analysis for this report, we employed mind mapping to identify and connect key themes from the research with the project's overarching themes. The process involved three researchers familiar with the data, each independently generating suggestions for main themes.

These ideas were then discussed collaboratively, allowing for refinement and the grouping of related concepts. Ultimately, we identified the three most significant themes within each of the project's main areas: navigation, negotiation, and future-making.

Wheeldon, J. & Ahlberg, M. (2017). Mind Maps in Qualitative Research. In: Liamputtong, P. (eds) Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2779-6_7-1



Emerging themes

Navigation, negotiation and
future-making

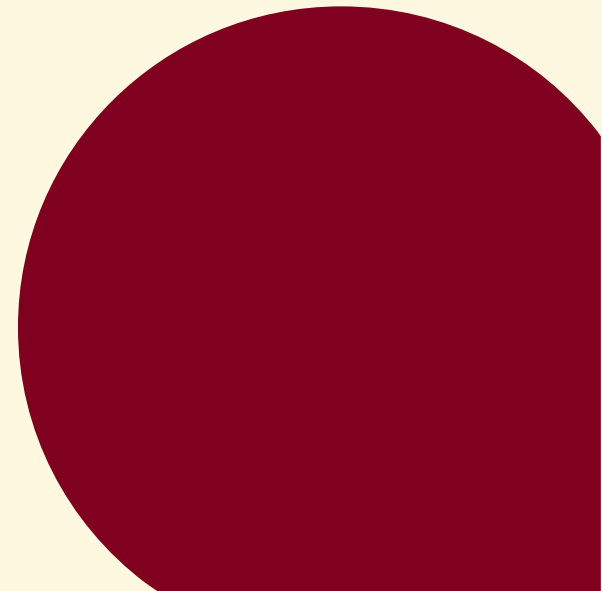
Navigation

How and why people of different generations interact with different platforms, individually and jointly, and 'domesticate' them to make them meaningful within their everyday lives.

1 Digital
mediation

2 Siloed
consumption

3 Mums in
the middle



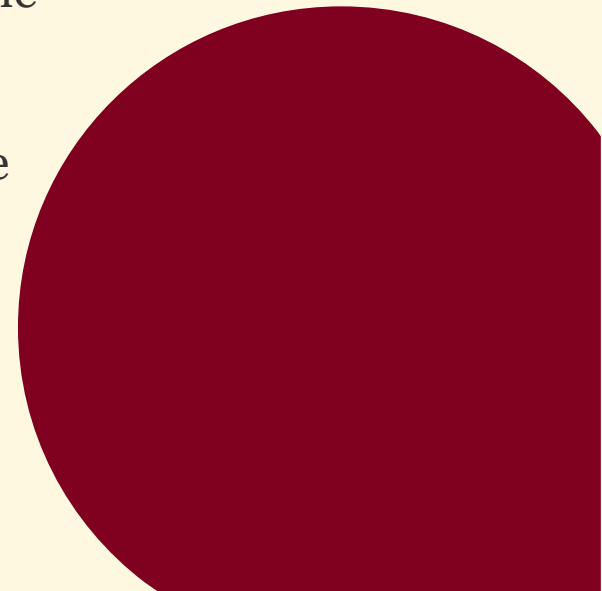
Navigation

1 Digital mediation

Digital mediation refers to the extent to which family communication and engagement is mediated by digital platform use. **Families exist on a spectrum where some report high levels of digital mediation, while others have very little digital mediation.** Of course, many families fall somewhere in-between.

For families with high levels of mediation, platforms and technologies play a key role in how the family communicates on a day-to-day basis.

Those with low levels of mediation rely noticeably less on technology to manage the practicalities of daily life.



1 Digital mediation

High

“There's speakers in pretty much every room. And you can also, although the system's a bit glitchy at times, you can tell it, to just announce to one room. So you don't have to echo it around the house. You can say, just announce to [son's] room. So if I've already been down three times to say it's time to go, then I could just say, tell [son] to get out.”

Mum, 50, UK

Low

“Just because you put, like, a picture of yourself on your status doesn't mean, like, bring anyone closer to you. Because, like, you know them. [...] I don't think posting a photo of you on holiday or like a cute little video you've seen is going to change a relationship.”

Girl, 11, UK

Navigation

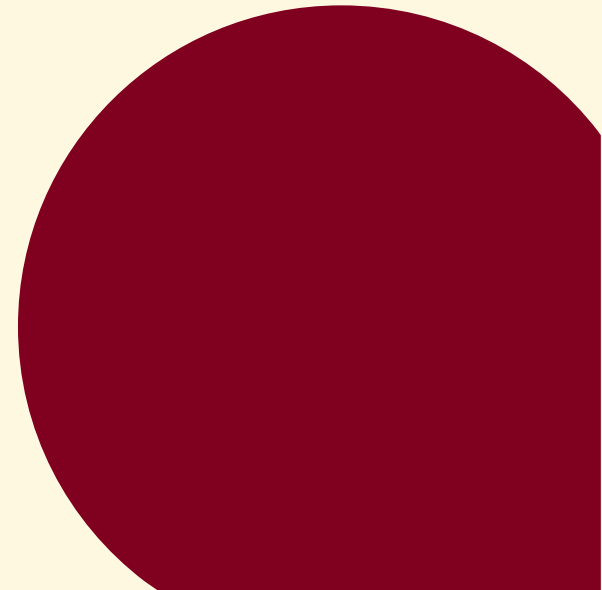
2 Siloed consumption

There is a tendency towards individual rather than collective use of apps and platforms. We found that most families retained separate accounts for music streaming apps, social media, and platforms for consuming content.

Many of **these platforms are designed for users to personalise their profiles and tailor their consumption to their personal taste**, making app use a largely individual experience.

“[My son] used to have my YouTube as well, so just [...] recently I said to him, ‘can I please delete all your subscriptions from my YouTube now, because they're just... [...] It takes me longer, much longer to scroll down to Yoga with Adrienne.”

Mum, 52, UK



Navigation

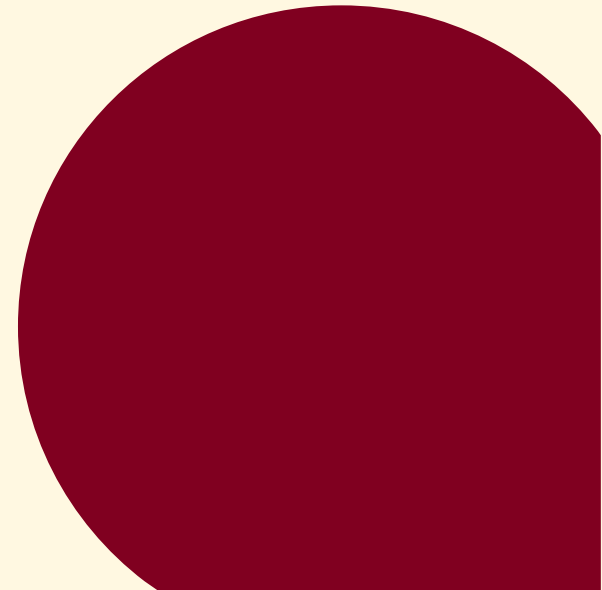
3 Mums in the middle

To a greater extent than fathers, **mothers express how the task of keeping communication going both within and outside the household tends to fall on them.**

Mothers are typically responsible for making sure that everyone in the family is kept up to date on future plans, and they might have to juggle several channels of communication to achieve this.

“I am going to try and message to try and get [the family] together again. I've decided that if I want this to happen, I'm going to have to be the one that does it, you know what I mean? And I accept that I might have to be the one to do all that kind of thing.”

Mum, 52, UK



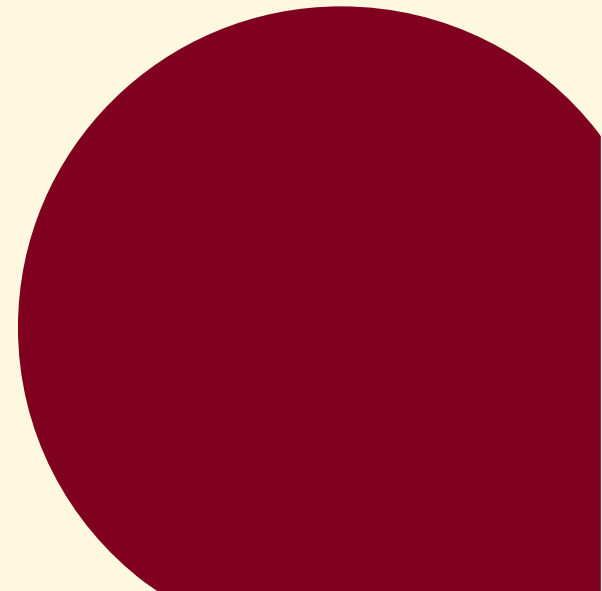
Negotiation

How and why relationships within and beyond the family are co-constructed and reshaped by engaging with or relying on platforms.

1 Digital
enmeshment

2 Family
boundaries

3 Privacy
ambivalence



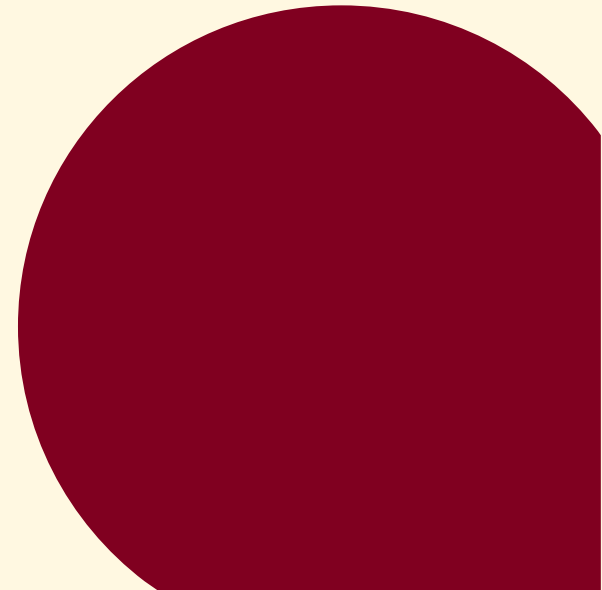
Negotiation

1 Digital enmeshment

Families are connected digitally to varying degrees. While some are in almost constant communication sharing pictures, jokes and accounts, others prefer to limit their digital entanglement to messages confirming place and time for the next family dinner.

Some report using technology as a means of fostering closeness through sharing digital interests, whether that be watching movies on Netflix together or sending each other funny posts from social media.

Within some families, the role digital technologies play in maintaining and developing relational context differ across the generations.



Negotiation

1 Digital enmeshment

High

“my Amazon and my Netflix accounts are both actually [my daughter’s] that I share. We have an Amazon free delivery where we order stuff, which is [my other daughter’s] account. [...] We are a very close family. [...] [My daughter] tries to look after everybody like she's their mother, including [my wife] and I. I mean, the little camera we've got, security camera out there, she bought. [Her partner] put it up for us you know, and things like that. And she's always coming round.”

Granddad, 64, UK

Low

“Other than Christmases and New Year and Easter [...] not a lot of organisation really, at all. Because the most important thing is to see the family. So, if the family say, ‘can we pop round and see you and all the rest of it, and say, yeah, stay for something, for a meal or whatever’, that's when you react [...] So not a great deal of pre-planning or organisation in between those sort of set times.”

Granddad, 78, UK

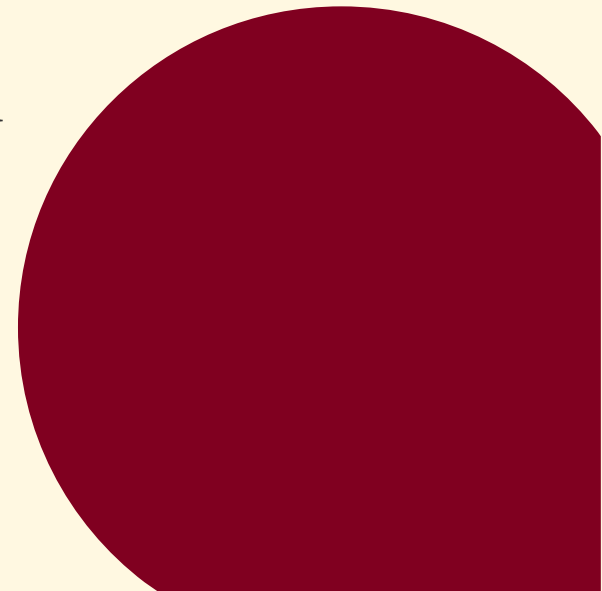
Negotiation

2 Family boundaries

Digital messaging platforms like WhatsApp allow users to easily create groups of contacts for shared communication across its members. The boundaries that are drawn through the creation of such group can sometimes seem to define who's "in" and who's "out" of the family.

Often, families have several groups to reflect the variety of constellations that can exist within the wider family as well as the "core".

Families differ in whether in-laws are included in the messaging groups or not, and some report adding or being added as a "gesture", **indicating the symbolic significance that group membership might have.**



Negotiation

2 Family boundaries

“A lot of [the group conversation] is in [another language], so my wife doesn't really contribute at all. Same as my brother's wife because they don't understand what's being said, but at least they feel part of it. I think they felt left out when they found out about this group. My sister-in-law spoke, she saw the group and made kind of a jokey comment to my mom, and then my mom added them.”

Dad, 39, UK

“They have a WhatsApp group, a siblings WhatsApp group. And there's a family WhatsApp group as well that we are part of. In fact, there are two families. The WhatsApp groups are proliferating. And there's a family WhatsApp group which is slightly wider. It includes a friend of ours who always comes to us for Christmas and holidays, and she's almost a sort of honorary aunt. [...] And then there's the WhatsApp group which is just us and the four grown-up kids.”

Grandma, 79, UK

Negotiation

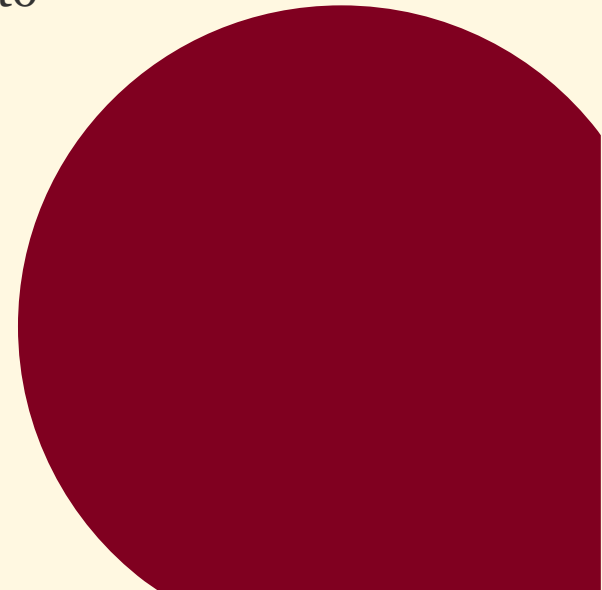
3 Privacy ambivalence

While the families interviewed express some concern over data privacy regarding sharing their data with private companies and the prevalence of scammers, there was **limited concern over digital privacy within the family or with digital sharing.**

Furthermore, it was common for parents to track their children using location-tracking apps, and to a lesser extent the grandparents. Worries about safety seems to take priority over concerns about privacy.

Of course, it's easier to send information quickly and easily. People get to know it easily. But it hasn't changed. [...] The limits of privacy are not different from one to the other.

Granddad, 78, overseas



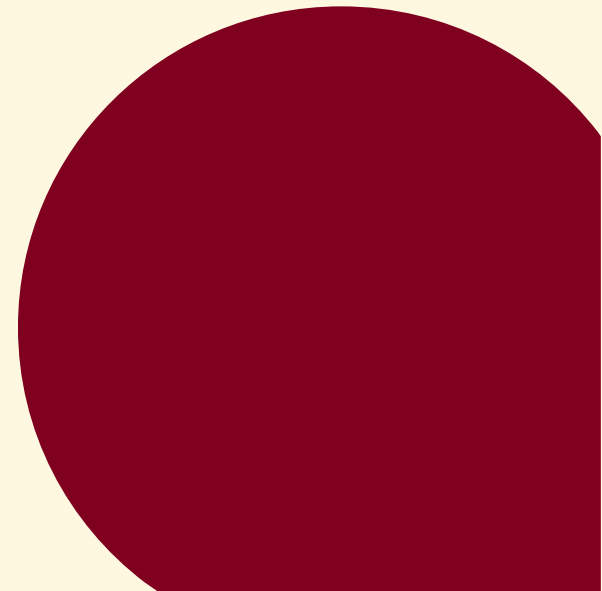
Future-making

How and why multigenerational families anticipate digital futures, both personal and societal, creating imaginaries that shape present practices and, potentially, future outcomes.

1 Unknowable
futures

2 Apps to
adulthood

3 Lasting bonds,
digital shifts



Future-making

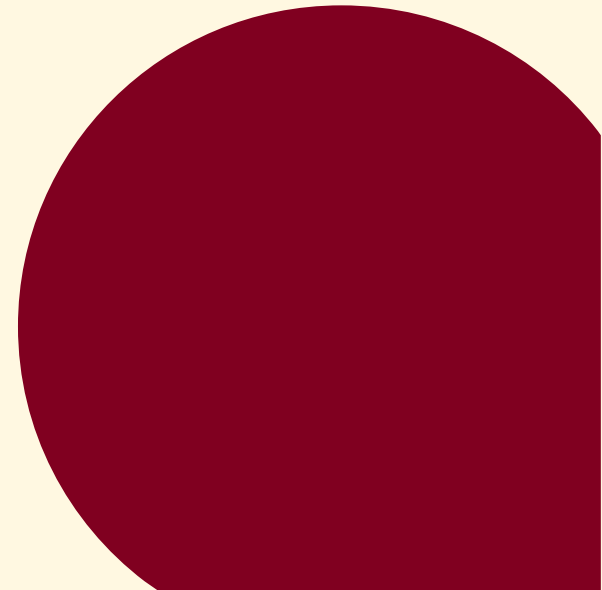
1 Unknowable futures

The families expressed **difficulty in anticipating and articulating what the future might look like** in terms of platform development. Many participants stated that it was impossible to imagine the direction and impact of technological advancement.

The participants who allowed themselves to speculate often tended towards dystopian predictions, emphasising potential risks and anxieties about the future.

“I don't think about the future [...] I'm more worried about the future for [the younger generations], really. You know, the things are not good, are they, for the last couple of years? It's just, I think they're taking a nasty turn, aren't they?”

Granddad, 82, UK



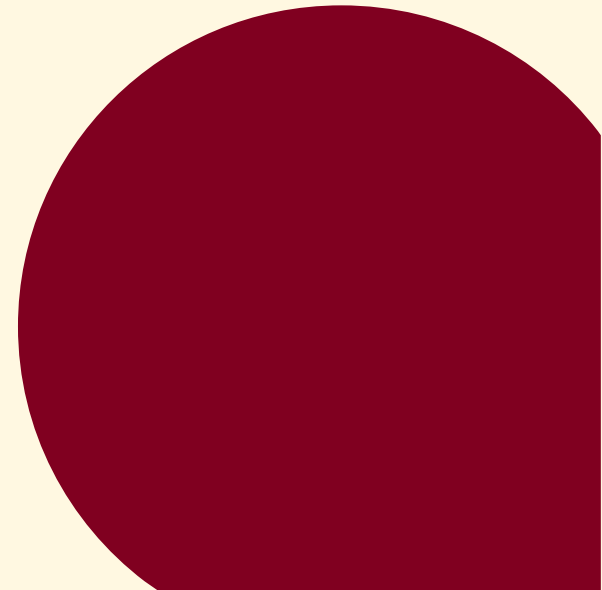
Future-making

2 Apps to adulthood

The younger generation expressed a much clearer picture of what their digital futures held for them than their parents and grandparents.

Children predicted that they would use **more apps as they entered their teenage years** and had specific ideas about what apps they interpreted as being part of current teenagers' digital repertoires.

Teenagers generally believed they would use **fewer apps as they entered adulthood, especially once they started university**. Particularly Snapchat and gaming platforms were believed to be left behind, or at least greatly reduced in frequency. Teenagers expressed a general desire to reduce app use.



Future-making

2 Apps to adulthood

Predicting teenagedom

“I think because less and less teachers are using Kahoot it will probably get replaced with Blooket [...] And then eventually I think I'll get probably TikTok when I'm old enough [...] I don't think Instagram, but I want to go on BeReal eventually. I don't think I'll ever go on Instagram because it's for like 60-year-olds.”

Girl, 12, UK

Predicting adulthood

“Right now, I'm trying to use my phone less and less, so if anything, I'm hoping to reduce those. For example, TikTok, I'm off it, I've been off it for a few months now [...] [GoG gaming app] I'm thinking of stopping anyways because I don't want to use it too much [...] I don't really take much joy from [gaming] alone, so there's no need.”

Boy, 16, UK

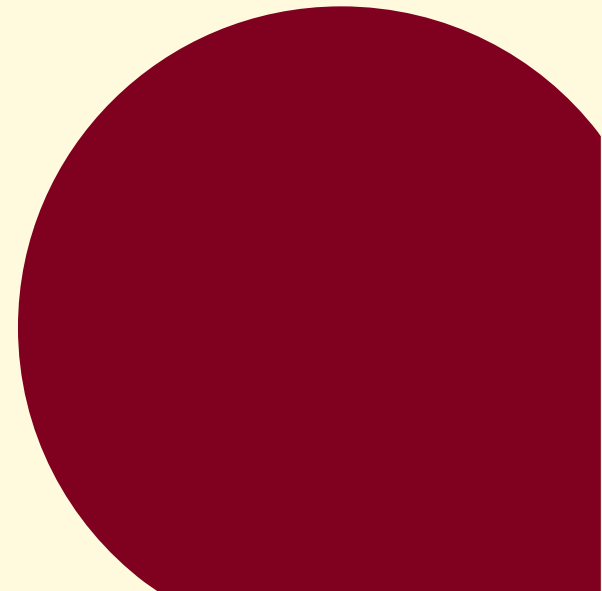
Future-making

3 Lasting bonds, digital shifts

While almost all families used platforms to stay connected to some extent, they also largely agreed that **digital communication can't replace in-person connections.**

Across all generations, participants expressed a preference for face-to-face communication. Even in highly digitally mediated and enmeshed families, there was an acknowledgement of the fact that virtual connection can only go so far.

Underpinning this was also a sense of technological obsolescence and new inventions being an inevitability. Seeing old technologies and modes of relating phased out might produce the impression that over time, **physical togetherness is a mode of engagement that stands the test of time.**



3 Lasting bonds, digital shifts

Children

“In person is a bit more real. Because sometimes if you spend a lot of time online, then it can be a bit more repetitive. Obviously sharing videos is a bit different because it's engaging from everywhere. But I think it's better to spend time in real life.”

Girl, 15, UK

Parents

“I mean, obviously face-to-face is better [...] I mean, I suppose if they live far away, it'd be different. But, yeah, like I say, apart from our, like, brother-in-law and sister-in-law who are like an hour and a half away. Everyone else, face to face is easier.”

Mum, 42, UK

Grandparents

“I just don't believe you can possibly have the same relationship online as you can face to face. In fact, I'm adamant about it [...] And the technology is the same as a telephone. The fact that I've got a picture of them in front of me as against just the voice is marginal.”

Granddad, 76, UK



Next steps

PlatFAMs continues through 2025

The research teams are currently engaged in analysing, interpreting, comparing and writing up the research across countries.

Feedback and suggestions are most welcome, as we continue this work. We are also reflecting on the possible implications for policy and practice.

To follow project updates bit.ly/Platfams



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**More about the
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